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ABSTRACT

Intended to help educators explain an instructional program to parents, this document presents and discusses the following ten statements reflecting traditional views about teaching reading: (1) Reading is a simple, passive mental process. (2) An efficient reader pronounces every word in the passage. (3) When children come to an unfamiliar word, they must be able to sound it out. (4) If children don't read well, more phonics will help. (5) Reading should be error free. (6) There is only one basic sequence of reading skills. (7) Using the finger to point to words will cause a beginning reader to become dependent on this strategy. (8) All readers need practice in oral reading. (9) Children learn best by sitting quietly and listening to the teacher explain the skills. (10) Children are most like adults in their thinking and least alike in their feelings. Material for transparencies illustrating the text and presenting reading tasks to the audience are included. (EL)

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WHAT'S "BASIC" IN READING INSTRUCTION?:

A Presentation for Parents

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ABSTRACT

Teachers and school administrators are called upon to present orientation sessions for parents to explain their instructional programs. This article is designed to take an audience through activities to consider "What is Basic in Reading Instruction." Ten statements that reflect traditional views about teaching reading are presented and discussed. Transparencies which show examples of text and presents reading tasks to the audience are included and explanations of audience participation is suggested.

What's BASIC in Reading Instruction?: A Presentation for Parents

"Back to the basics!" demand parents, school boards, and government officials. Such nationwide concern has resulted in severe criticism of teachers and teaching, with the university blaming the high school which blames the junior high, which in turn blames the elementary school. With such conflicting criticisms parents of elementary children are requesting explanations regarding "basic" approaches in curriculum and in instructional strategies as well. The problem with this request, however, raises the question of what is the meaning of "back to the basics." Too often "what is basic?" is asked, but not genuinely addressed from the perspective of both teacher and parent. To meet this challenge we have developed a presentation suitable for PTA and other parent groups. The sessions have proved most successful and have resulted in positive comments and supportive parents.

To stimulate thought, to address questions in the minds of the adults, and to gain audience involvement, ten statements titled "Is it really basic?" are presented on overhead transparencies. Each statement is displayed one-at-a-time accompanied by discussion and, as often as possible, by short tasks which solicit audience involvement. In this article the ten "Is it really basic?" statements are presented with examples and points for discussion. (A bibliography is provided to document the ideas and as resources for further reading.)

Statement I: Reading is a simple, passive mental process.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement I)

It has been assumed that once children can say each word, they are reading, and thus they are comprehending. This idea suggests that the knowledge gained by reading will passively add to existing infromation. Actually, knowledge about the reading process indicates that the reader must construct meaning (Rumelhart and Ortony 1977). It is likely, for example, that you can easily pronounce all the words in the following list. If you can not, however, a dictionary can provide the meanings.

(Display Transparency 2)

Even though you could easily use all the words in a sentence, the words came from the following passage, a paragraph found in a high school textbook.

(Display Transparency 3)

Was this paragraph gobbledegook to you? We chose it because our experiences and vocabulary are very different from that of the author and we find it difficult to understand. In order to gain knowledge from reading, one must be able to relate the words and sentences to personal experiences, the new information to the known information (Pearson and Johnson 1978). If the background and experiences of the author and reader are not shared, the reader must then try to relate similarities in experience with the author's subject to construct the thoughts.

(Display Transparency 4)

The more alike the experiences and vocabulary of the author and reader, the more complete comprehension will be. This is why we would find comprehending a book on thermodynamics difficult. Everyone is illiterate in the subjects that are new and foreign. In the following example you are likely to be able to pronounce all the words, yet not know what the author is communicating.

(Display Transparency 5)

While the nonsense words do not convey meaning, the questions are easily answered. This is because readers use the language cues provided in sentence patterns (syntax) to gain meaning. Teachers have found that children have much more difficulty with words appearing in lists than with those same words in the context of a meaningful sentence (Goodman 1965). Children should be encouraged to use their language competence as a source of help.

Statement II: <u>An efficient reader pronounces every word in the passage</u>.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement II)

Reading research reveals that reading is an active process as we have already discussed. To gain meaning, the reader must let his mind construct ideas. Does the reader focus on every word

to do this? Read the following humorous passage.

(Display Transparency 6)

Without looking back, how many mistakes did you see? There were eight: wanna for want to, student's for students, dont for don't, hafta for have to, your for you're, and principle for principal. Also, did you notice that "old" was omitted on the last line and there were two "the's" on line four?

Whether or not you saw the mistakes is not important because probably it did not prevent you from obtaining the intended message. Readers search for and gain meaning by using the total language, not individual words.

In another example see how much you know about the story, even though every fifth word is omitted.

(Display Transparency 7)

These examples point out that comprehendion can occur even if words are unknown. Good readers focus on comprehension and do not let single words interfere with their search for meaning.

Statement III: <u>When a child comes to an unfamiliar word,</u>
<u>he must be able to sound-it-out</u>.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement III)

Good readers do not stop the comprehending process to sound out words. In the following passage, note how much you know about "slivovitz" when you finish reading.

(Display Transparency 8)

In this passage it was irrelevant whether in oral reading you would have pronounced "slivovitz" as SIL vo vitz, sli VO vitz, of sli vo VITZ. Saying it aloud was unnecessary. Just as in encountering difficult names, such as long names in Russian novels, meanings can be established without knowing the correct pronounciation. Did you notice that as you read the passage, each sentence added to your understanding of the idea? Good readers go from print to meaning; not from print, to sound to meaning (Smith 1978).

It is also important to consider what happens to comprehension when the reader stops to sound-out words. There is a limitation imposed on human beings by our short-term memory. For example, if you stop reading in the middle of a sentence, you may not remember about the first part when you get to the end of the sentence. Certainly, this would not only interfere with sentence meaning but with the comprehension of the total passage.

One successful strategy we have encouraged students to try is to skip the word or substitute "blank" for the troublesome word, and keep reading. It is the same strategy you used when you read the Slivovitz example. This is what efficient readers do. They know that other cues in the text will provide meaning.

Statement IV: <u>If a child doesn't read well, more phonics will help</u>.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement IV)

Overreliance on phonics often causes readers to misunder-

stand what reading is all about (Canney and Winograd 1979). If phonics is the only cue a reader uses, he is sure to think that the importance of reading is to say individual words rather than to gain the ideas of the author. An additional problem exists because phonics rules are inconsistent. Focusing on these generalizations may give readers a false sense of assurance that learning phonics will help them comprehend. Research indicates that readers often must be able to pronounce the words before they can apply phonics (Smith 1978).

In the following example there are no phonic rules that can be consistently applied to help you pronounce the first two letters of each word.

(Display Transparency 9)

Rather than offering more "skill" instruction in phonics to unsuccessful readers, emphasis should be placed on using the context, the sentence-sense and the meaning to unlock new words. Instruction should be focused on the development of a love for stories and for finding out about things of interest through reading. Providing experiences which will stimulate inquiry and will encourage reading for information and enjoyment, will pay off in improved reading skills. Children seem to learn their sounds by involvement in the total process of reading. Only then are they using the relevant cues in their search for meaning.

Statement V: Reading should be error free.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement V)

Although it is sometimes difficult to believe, reading is never error free. Consider the time that you read to your child and you had to reread to make a sentence sound right. Try reading the following paragraph and see if you make errors.

(Display Transparency 10. It is helpful to have a willing participant read this aloud. A recorded tape can also be used effectively.)

Did you have to change your word choice to fit the meaning? The paragraph was designed to cause the reader to predict the wrong word, requiring a correction in the mind to make sense. Words such as "bow," "tears," "read," "minute," and "does" are ambigious. Not only are their pronunciations unpredictable, but their meanings can not be determined without context.

Reading is an active, constructive process because the reader is constantly predicting, confirming and comprehending (Goodman and Burke 1980). If "bows" was predicted wrongly, good readers correct so that they will be able to confirm and thus comprehend. The important point for a reader to know is <u>when</u> to correct. By encouraging a child to seek meaning and correct when what is read does not "make sense," the errors or unknown words often take care of themselves.

Statement VI: <u>There is only one basic sequence of reading skills</u>.

While all publishers of instructional materials develop their texts around a sequence of skills, investigation reveals that the sequence is different with each publisher. Some text series begin

with single consonant sounds, still others begin with the vowel sounds, while others begin with letter recognition. These differences probably have originated because adults can not reconstruct how they learned to read. It seems logical that by analyzing the written language into the smallest parts, letters and sounds, and teaching these individual units; the young reader will be able to put the units together into meaningful language. Such an analysis of the reading process results in a sequence developed from the adult's point of view. Careful research to determine a child's point of view in the development of this complex process is only now beginning (Clay 1979). In spite of the variety of sequences of reading skills, most children are able to accomplish the task of learning to read, regardless of the method. Proportionately,there is a small percentage of individuals who fail to use reading to meet their needs.

Statement VII: <u>Using the finger to point to words will cause a beginning reader to become dependent on this strategy</u>.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement VII)

Although children come to the reading task with a very sophisticated level of language maturity, many do not have concepts important for reading. They must develop understandings that print is read from left to right, that letters make up words, that there are spaces between words, and the idea that reading is comprehending a written message (Downing 1979). To learn the

aspects of print that are critical, children must become involved with printed messages (Clay 1979). The child can not grasp all the complexities at one time, especially since the cues are so numerous and also abstract. By using a finger as a beginning crutch, the child has the support to maintain his place, and the adult can know just what is happening as the child attempts to acquire the message. For example, children often must be shown that words, such as "hafta," are really two words, "have to." These confusions can easily be untangled if the adult becones aware of the problem areas which pointing allows. As children gain fluency, the need for finger pointing disappears.

Statement VIII: <u>All readers need practice in oral reading</u>.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement VIII)

Most adults feel it is helpful to sit quietly as the reader practices reading aloud. While this has been a common practice, especially for young readers, for children who have been unsuccessful, it may be a discouraging and defeating strategy. Additionally, it may support inappropriate strategies. Research reveals that silent reading is a receptive process, while oral reading is productive, a very different process (Durkin 1979). The efficient reader develops meanings from written language without having to produce each word into sounds. This is why people can read so much faster than they speak. Encouraging oral reading practice after the very beginning stages can result in word-by-word reading and prevent the development of silent reading strategies so necessary for efficient reading.

Because of the misunderstanding that the teaching of reading requires oral reading practice, children often report to their parents that they did not have reading that particular day. Unless their group sat in a circle while each child read aloud in turn, the "round-robin" approach, they feel they had no reading period. The idea that reading is enjoyable and provides interesting information is often lost in this traditional "round-robin" approach. Good teachers provide children with many opportunities to read stories silently followed by discussion, written reactions, opportunities to look up information about points of interest, opportunities to read another child's written story and so on. Reading is valued because of the exciting ideas it can provide.

Statement IX: Children learn best by sitting quietly and listening to the teacher explain the skills.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement IX)

Studies about learning indicate that all human beings, adults and children alike, learn best as active participants (Norman 1977). Too often children are told about reading skills rather than being provided with opportunities to practice using the skills in meaningful reading. Just as one would not expect a swimmer to become proficient without practice, the reader can not learn to read well without practicing. The child, who has parents and a teacher who provide time to become a proficient reader through the practice of meaningful reading in good books, is fortunate. A balance and integration of the many skills can

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be accomplished only through an involvement with the total reading process.

Statement X: Children are most like adults in their thinking and least alike in their feelings.

(Display Transparency 1, Statement X)

Theories about child learning have suggested that a child's thinking is very different from that of an adult (Elkind 1970). Examples abound as one really listens to children's responses. When a six year old reports that a watch is alive because it ticks or a tree is not alive because it does not have eyes, we must accept the notion that children do not reason and think like adults. Because of this, reading instruction must be presented with the child's thinking in mind.

On the other hand, children--like adults--need to have feelings of acceptance, of success and accomplishment to develop positive attitudes. To develop such attitudes children must have opportunities for choice, for support when it is needed, especially when learning a new and difficult task such as reading. Adults must show them that books offer all kinds of exciting experiences. Reading good stories to children--and with children too--in a pleasant and happy setting will not only provide for the development of good reading skills, but will establish lasting warm relationships between the adult and child.

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Transparency 1

IS IT REALLY BASIC?

Statement I	Reading is a simple, passive process.
Statement II	An efficient reader pronounces every word in the passage.
Statement III	When a child comes to an unfamiliar word, he must be able to sound-it-out.
Statement IV	If a child doesn't read well, more phonics will help.
Statement V	Reading should be error free.
Statement VI	There is one basic sequence of reading skills.
Statement VII	Using the finger to point to words will cause a beginning reader to become dependent on this strategy.
Statement VIII	All readers need practice in oral reading.
Statement IX	Children learn best by sitting quietly and listening to the teacher explain the skills.
Statement X	Children are like adults in their thinking and least alike in their feelings.

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Transparency 2

Can you use each of these words in a sentence?

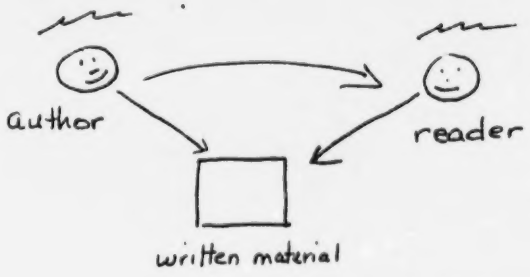
a	indeed	science
and	is	successes
as	it	systematic
brilliant	longer	time
bringing	large	that
classical	mechanics	variety
commonplace	nature	unprecedented
explaining	phenomena	universal
fundamental	regarded	were
	relations	

Transparency 3

Read the following passage.

It is commonplace that classical mechanics is no longer regarded as the universal and fundamental science of nature. Its brilliant successes in explaining and bringing into systematic relations a large variety of phenomena were at one time indeed unprecedented.*

Transparency 4



Readers try to reconstruct what the author had in mind when the ideas were written down.

Transparency 5

Read the words in the passage. Answer the questions.

Last Sural, Jaley and Hopla were sprulling their brips in the drem. Gluporly, Jaley's brip vumped. "Why did the brip vump in the drem? he remted.

"Oh, I norpled it vol a trum in it," sterped Hopla.

Questions: When did this story take place?

Who is this story about?

What were Jaley and Hopla doing?

Transparency 6

Quickly read the following story.

A mother was trying to wake her son to go to school. After the third call, the son answered, "I don't wanna go there. The student's dont like me and the the teachers don't like me."

The mother replied, "But you hafta. Your forty years and the principle!"

Transparency 7

Read the following passage. Do not stop at the blanks.

One morning I was _____ the garden, picking some _____. Suddenly a beautiful big _____ jay flew into a _____ not far away from _____. He sat on one _____ the branches, looking at me _____ his saucy, black eyes. I _____ very still, looking at _____. He was not afraid _____ me.

"What mischief are you _____ to now?" I said _____ softly. "You are usually_____ to some mischief!"

But _____ only sat up very _____ on the branch showing _____ his beautiful, smooth, blue _____.

Transparency 8

Read the passage. Do not stop to sound-out words.

They were all looking at the slivovitz. It had been a long time since they had seen any. In fact the last time was in their native langd in Europe.

It has been famous there since the Middle Ages. It comes from the fruit of trees never less than 20 years old. The fruit is a blue plum.

Slivovitz matures in wooden kegs for one year. Then it is bottled and aged another five years. It is the national Yugoslovian drink.

Transparency 9

Each of the following words begins with "ho." Notice how the sounds vary in each case.*

hock	house	honey	horizon
hoot	horse	honest	hour
hot	home	hoist	

* These word were taken from "The Role of Prediction in Reading, by Frank Smith. Elementary English, March 1975

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Transparency 10

The boys' arrows were nearly gone so they sat down on the grass and stopped hunting. Over at the edge of the woods they saw Henry making a bow to a little girl who was coming down the road. She had tears in her dress and also tears in her eyes. She gave Henry a note which he brought over to the group of young hunters. Read to the boys it caused great excitement. After a minute but rapid examination of their weapons they ran down the valley. Does were standing at the end of the lake making an excellent target.